Five Decades, and Still Ticking

Three busy senior medical students decided to complicate their lives a little more in 1962 when they began the continuing tradition of the Pulse yearbook. That heartbeat is going strong after 50 years.

by Edward Neuert

I was a little hesitant, frankly, because I knew what was going to be involved in doing this, and I already had a lot on my plate,” says Michael Grady, M.D.’62, as he sits in his Chestnut Hill, Mass., home. The retired pediatrician is recalling the moment in late 1961 when, talking with his two friends and classmates, Sherwin Ritter and Norman Schwartz, the idea suddenly came up: they should start a real yearbook for the College of Medicine, and Grady would be their “voice of experience.”

The years medical students spend at UVM remain treasured memories long afterward, which is reflected in their record support for their alma mater — the College of Medicine consistently ranks in the top three medical schools in the nation for percentage of alumni giving. Another facet in that reflection is the tradition that Grady, Ritter, and Schwartz as co-editors first inaugurated back in the early days of the 1960s: the Pulse, the student organized and staffed annual that celebrates its 50th anniversary this year.

Nationally, the yearbook is an institution in decline; the number of annuals produced in the U.S. is only about 40 percent of what it was 15 years ago. But despite the rise of the Internet, and the pervasiveness of Facebook, there is still something to be said for a memory book that won’t disappear with a crashed hard drive, or be inaccessible when CDs join 8-track tapes in the land of outmoded storage media.

In 1961, there was no Facebook (nor even, yet, a Mark Zuckerberg), nor was there yet computer-aided design and typesetting to speed the production of a publication. Making a yearbook meant doing everything by hand — from taking and developing photographs, to banging out copy in triplicate forms on a typewriter, to setting up the layout boards and mailing the whole lot off to a faraway printer. Michael Grady knew all too well what a time-consuming process it could be: four years earlier, he’d gone through the whole effort as the editor of his Boston College yearbook, the Sub Turri.

Now, in addition to finishing their clinical studies and interviewing for internships and residencies, the three students would immerse themselves part-time in the graphic arts.

First, though, recalls retired orthopedic surgeon Sherwin Ritter, M.D.’62, there was the little matter of paying for it all. “It doesn’t seem like much now, but each copy cost fifteen dollars then, and we weren’t really sure how we were going to get it,” says Ritter. But Dean Robert Slater, M.D., was supportive, and the trio found a strong champion in A. Bradley Soule, M.D.’28, who was then chairman of the Department of Radiology.
and an influential voice within both the administration and the alumni community. Slater and Soule arranged for a special fee to be added to the tuition bill. “I can still hear a few people screaming bloody murder about it,” remembers Ritter. “But we got the money we needed, and most students supported it.” They also had a secret weapon in their fellow senior student, Joseph Guardino. “Joe had been in business before he came to med school,” says Grady, recalling his late friend and classmate. “He was a great salesman. Once Joe got in the room with you, he wasn’t going to leave before you’d agreed to buy an ad,” says Grady. And buy them they did; flipping through the back pages of that first Puls, today, one is greeted by a host of gone-but-not-forgotten retail landmarks of the Burlington area, from Magr’s department store to Valade’s Terminal Restaurant and Cafeteria, and Winooksi’s Forest Hills Factory Outlet. One other member of the class of ’62, Daniel Palant, rounded out the crew as faculty section editor.

After securing funding, what followed were several months of finding a book producer (they ultimately went to the people of Vermont, and they secured a dedicatory letter from then Governor F. Ray Keyser, Jr. “Things were a lot simpler back then,” says Grady. “We called up the governor’s office, asked if we could come see him, and they told us, sure, come on down.”

All their hard work, Grady, Ritter, and Schwartz’s excitement was high in late spring of ’62 when cartons filled with the first Puls arrived at the College. But, to their collective horror, a printing error had saturated every photo with ink. “Everything was just a murky blob,” recalls Ritter. Luckily, the printer agreed to make good, and a new, corrected print run arrived in time for distribution before graduation, which in those days occurred in mid-June. “They were four years of memorable experiences and associations with classmates and medical school faculty,” he says. “Memories and values that have been with me for all my years in post-graduate training and throughout my years of practice.”

Class of 1962 members Michael Grady, M.D. (at left) and Sherwin Ritter, M.D., the two surviving founding co-editors of the first Puls, look over a selection of issues from across the past five decades in the medical history room of the Dana Medical Library during Reunion 2012.